



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE REGARDING
BUSINESS AND COMMERCE
HOUSE BILL 914**

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The Honorable Senator Kelly Hancock, Chair, The Honorable Robert Nichols, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Business and Commerce.

Good morning. My name is Maria Irshad and I am here to present testimony on House Bill 914 relating to the authority of certain municipal employees to request the removal and storage of illegally parked or inoperable vehicles. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. The City of Houston's commitment to public safety, neighborhood quality of life, traffic mobility and serving the public more efficiently is why we are here to voice our support for this bill.

Annually, the City of Houston receives about 9,000 service requests to address parking violations. Over 4,500 or a little more than half of these requests were requests to investigate abandoned vehicles. Our parking compliance officers initially visit the location and mark the vehicles to measure the time they have been parked on the public street without moving. They will return and if the car has not moved within 72 hours, it is considered abandoned and should be towed. Because our officers are not licensed peace officers, they cannot tow the vehicle. To remove the nuisance from a neighborhood, they must coordinate with the Police Department to have it towed.

Neighborhood quality of life is important to the City, but Police often have more urgent public safety needs to address and may not be available to meet the tow-truck driver and tow the vehicle. This creates a delay in removing the vehicle from the public street and the citizens become frustrated by what they perceive as a lack of responsiveness. With the passage of House Bill 914, the parking compliance officer can request a tow upon verifying that the vehicle is abandoned and is already at the site. The Bill allows municipalities to be more responsive to our citizens and eliminates the need to have two government employees address the same request to tow one vehicle.

Rush hours are the most heavily traveled times in our cities. In Houston, mobility lanes have been established for the smooth flow of traffic on major thoroughfares. During rush hour, the parking lane is eliminated to provide an extra lane of traffic to improve mobility and reduce congestion. One car illegally parked during these times creates a traffic jam and increases the commute time for hundreds of drivers.

Parking Compliance Officers are patrolling and issuing citations to the cars that park illegally in the mobility lanes. However, the primary purpose of the mobility lane is the smooth flow of traffic. To restore the smooth

flow of traffic and decrease the congestion during the commute hours, the vehicle must be towed as quickly as possible. Police Officers are often addressing moving violations and accidents during this busy time. The car remains illegally parked and blocking the mobility lane; creating additional congestion and traffic hazards during the rush hour. However, the Parking Compliance Officer is available to have the vehicle promptly towed and help restore the flow of traffic.

Parking Compliance Officers are dedicated to supporting public safety, quality of life initiatives and mobility through the enforcement of parking regulations. Parking Compliance officers already have the authority to tow vehicles parked illegally in residential permit parking areas and to tow vehicles that have been immobilized due to unpaid citations.

Issuing a citation to an illegally parked vehicle addresses the violation but does not fully meet the public safety need in some situations. Having the ability to tow illegally parked and abandoned vehicles further empowers us to strongly mitigate parking issues and truly address the public safety concern. An illegally parked vehicle could be blocking a mobility lane, blocking access to first responders in the case of an emergency or hindering visibility of oncoming traffic. The vehicle needs to be removed expeditiously from the public right-of-way for the safety of the public. An abandoned vehicle creating blight and nuisance in a neighborhood should also be removed for the quality of life for the residents.

The passage of House Bill 914 will free Police Officers from this responsibility and provide them with more time to address more urgent public safety issues. It will establish a much more efficient process by eliminating the need to have two employees investigate the same incident.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Committee and your attention to this matter.